

VISUAL CODES OF DYSTOPIA IN VIDEO GAMES: REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL CLASS DIFFERENCES

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Abstract:

Nowadays, video games in one form or another are present in the life of every person. The interdisciplinary nature of science field allows to consider them from the point of view of both technical and humanitarian sciences. At the same time, the nature of the study will depend on many factors: setting, genre, style, world history, gameplay and others. Even the approach to studying the game may differ depending on what a particular researcher decides to focus his attention on. The main task of this work is to analyse the visual codes of class representation, which is used by artists and game designers when creating dystopian spaces. The purpose of the study is to try to answer the following questions: why do video games need representation of the social class differences? What is the nature of those visual representations? How does the setting affect the graphic elements of the narrative? How does the dialogue between the philosophy of negative utopia and the game space take place? An integral element of the narrative in dystopia is social class stratification. And if in literature visibility exists only in a descriptive form and with the support of the reader's imagination, then in video games and cinema the need to encode space using visual language comes to the fore in the design of the virtual world. Having a huge literary base, the developers of such spaces are looking for ways to embody and show not only the trials of life under total control. It is important to show exactly what lies at the root of a dystopian society, namely the difference between the life of a privileged class and an alienated person, limited by society, politics and rules.

Keywords: game studies, video game aesthetics, visual code, reminiscence, dystopia, setting

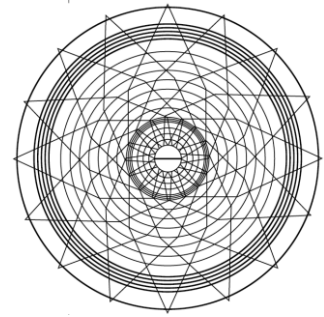
Introduction

Discrimination and class struggle are unpleasant but inevitable moments in world history. Whether humanity fights or exploits them, finds consensus or selfishly justifies them, one way or another these problems are topical, and scandals and discussions around them are preventive in nature. This warning trait, which underlies the existence

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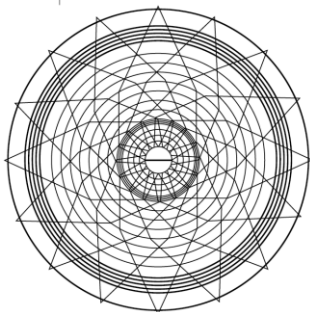


of the class struggle, opens up space for expression and discussion at the political, cultural and everyday level. A series of interrelated conflicts generated by public protest and community indignation against existing laws and traditions reflects the ambiguous nature of social relations. Through these connections, struggle is reflected in art and becomes a source of inspiration for visual decisions and statements.

Fiction has always been sensitive to the state of social thought, that's why the potential of utopian and dystopian narratives was always in a line of sight. By the end of the XIX century a number of visions of a negative utopia developed in a context of criticism of utopian society models. Being close in essence, but different in meaning, they acquire a different reading in the twentieth century in contrast to the period of the turn of the century. The initial reaction to the industrialization, criticism of capitalism and poverty developing in their shadow is replaced by fear of the future and the triumph of alienation. The formation of totalitarian states and new systems of social stratification in conjunction with the accelerated development of technology initially find a cultural response in the work of such writers as Yevgeny Zamyatin, George Orwell, Valery Bryusov, Aldous Huxley, Anthony Burgess, Ray Bradbury, Stanislaw Lem and the Strugatsky brothers. In the fiction of the XX century can be distinguished two types of dystopias: technogenic-psychological and socio-psychological (Korolyova, 2011). The commonality of problems in these types has formed a stable aesthetic and motive complex, reproduced in modern artistic futurology. Exposing the horror, grotesque and mendacity of utopian models, the authors send a message to new generations. If utopia is a tempting illusion, then dystopia is the future of the present if society is not careful. In fantasies about a state in which everyone is happy and equal, a special place is occupied by the question of the possibility of happiness "at a click": is it possible to force a person to be happy under duress? (Grishenkova & Chernyaev, 2014).

Cinema, being a medium no less sensitive to the social, absorbs the problems of the genre already in the first decades of its existence. In 1927, the silent dystopian drama *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang was released, in which the class struggle is demonstrated through the division of the futuristic city into two levels: Hell (lower industrial) and Paradise (upper prosperous). For example, in the animated series *Arcane* (2021), created in the steampunk aesthetics in the *League of Legends* (2009) universe, there is also a division of the city into the utopian Piltover and Zaun, the lower city of outcasts. Despite the oppressive atmosphere of Zaun and the borrowing of certain motifs of negative utopia, in general, the lore of the world refers to scientific fantasy, within which the interests of various factions compete.

The most active process of visualizing dystopias occurred in the 1960s and 1980s. For several decades, Jean-Luc Godard (*Alphaville*, 1965), François Truffaut (*Fahrenheit*



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451, 1966), Ridley Scott (*Blade Runner*, 1982) and a number of other directors comprehend variable scenarios of reality: both alternative and futuristic. In attempt to form a new imagery, they not only philosophically comprehend the problems of the future, but also with the help of film language metaphorically analyse the present and the eternal, discrimination and power. According to Yuri Zhadanov, the problem of dystopia in the 60s is associated with scientific and technological progress and the reaction to the surge of utopian literature and revolutionary moods in society (Zhadanov, 2010). The student movements that became worldwide were preoccupied with the war in Vietnam, the problems of militarization and the internal issues of their countries, which by 1968 led to a number of strikes and clashes with the police in France, the United States, Canada, Japan and other countries (Lim, 2016).

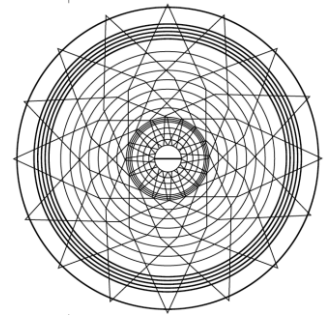
As a result of the full embodiment in the novel "1984" of the main features of dystopia, followed the evolution of the genre and its mixing with others (Zhadanov, 2010). The classic triad "Zamyatin – Huxley – Orwell" managed to create a self-sufficient genre, but further transformation was a necessary measure to preserve its relevance. In the 80s, the cyberpunk genre developed in literature within the framework of the existing trends of science fiction. Here, the basic problems are built around criticism and philosophical understanding of capitalism. William Gibson, John Branner, Bruce Bethke, Pat Cadigan consider the problems of artificial intelligence, the interaction of android and man, and the uncontrolled power of the corporation. The place of action is the technological world of the future. The future may be distant, it may be closer to "our" present, but the future of events is necessary to create a predictive direction. This is what will happen to society in the N span of years. The preventive character is generally characteristic of any dystopia, since the genre a priori represents the image of the future (Denisova, 2019).

One way or another, the problems of dystopian works come from the social class differences. The co-dependency of the corporate dictatorship and the production of technologies is reflected in the literature of cyberpunk through the slogan "high tech, low life". Its laconic simplicity hides a multi-layered plot about poverty, total control, the overproductionary crisis and the consequences of the technological singularity for the environment, society and economy. In classic examples of dystopias (*Brave New World*; 1984; *Us*), issues of ideology, political lies as a mechanism of action of power and personality of a place in a pseudo-utopian world come to the fore. Here, the state, creating the illusion of utopia, concentrates on the standardization of the population and the control of all spheres of human life. A large role in such narratives is played by political or ideological conflict. The sharper it is, the easier it is for the authorities to interpret for their own purposes, using conflict as an excuse for the need for new laws and control.

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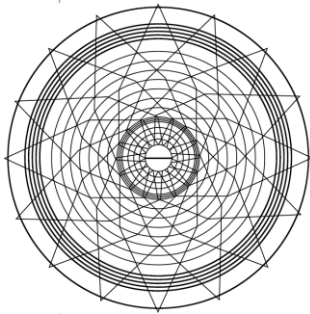
In the XXI century, many fears of science fiction writers have acquired real prototypes. The widespread introduction of video surveillance, surveillance through social networks and mobile devices, targeted advertising, the expansion of the powers of police structures are just one of the many phenomena of the new century, close in spirit to the concept of the panopticon (Foucault, 2002). Having popular subjects in its culture, society cannot but react to the potential threat of new technologies in the direction of rights and freedoms. So, the threat becomes the object of mass discussion and again finds a response in art and culture.

Narrative references and conflict of power

In video games, the dystopian plot is revealed in a new way, to a greater extent acting as a setting. The plot takes on the role of intertext and focuses on creation of visual constructs. The need to give the virtual world a single appearance that will reflect the world order not only externally, but also internally, poses a difficult task for game designers. How do you engage the player in the narrative and make them empathize with their hero? First of all, by using the narrative.

The hero of a negative utopia most often has two paths. He can perform a certain function and be one of the cogs of the state mechanism, or he can side with an alternative force and oppose himself to the rules of the game. In "The Matrix" by the Wachowski brothers or the novel "We" by Yevgeny Zamyatin, initially the hero does not oppose the world, but lives according to its laws. At a certain point, in accordance with the structure of Joseph Campbell's monomyth, he will receive a call: to abandon old beliefs and embark on the path of fighting "injustice" (Campbell, 1997). Moreover, classic examples of heroes from literature and cinema most often reside in static, unchanging worlds. The hero can still develop as the story would progress, but the real history of the world remains unknown or to a main character – rules have always been like this (Schulzke, 2014). Logical from the point of view of linear history, the hero's consent to confrontation acquires new shades in the video game.

In Papers, Please (2013), the hero's appeal comes from a radical group that planned to overthrow the regime in the state of Arstotzka. The gameplay is presented through monotonous verification of documents at the checkpoint. Despite the drab process, the narrative of the game reveals a dystopian mood through the need to maintain a family, dialogues with secondary characters and moral choices. For example, the hero receives monetary fines for mistakes during checking documents. At the end of the day, the distribution of finances takes place, and if they are lacking, the player will have to decide: to spend money on medicine, child or food. The radicals offer generous rewards for the help, although the player will still not be able to fully use them: excessive spending will



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be noticed by the neighbours and as a result of the denunciation, the main character will be interrogated. Through a series of plot choices, a character can go to jail for treason, die, remain loyal to the state, or help overthrow it. In addition, the introduction to the narrative occurs through minor characters. In the literature review, it was indicated that in dystopian narratives, a separate place in history is given to the topic of intimate relationships. Despite the fact that direct relationships are not visually represented in the game (the character and the player must be abstracted from any personal relationships other than work), the theme of sexual relations is still present in the game. This theme is presented through the story of a sex worker, whose pimp the player has the opportunity not to let through the border, by breaking the game rules. In addition, sex workers crossing the border will visually load the main desktop: they will throw up advertising spam-flyers and offer to come and "have fun".

Denying or supporting existing power becomes an important element of the game narrative. Dystopian reality is contradictory, it always has minuses, pluses and ambiguous conflicts. The image of power as an illusion or a myth becomes critical here. It exists, but is out of sight of the most citizens and is a network in which the center is not visible. Moving through the plot and discovering new parts of the story, players are forced to argue not only with different sides of the conflict, but also with themselves. Such an opportunity to play as a medium, where the choice is given directly to the player, significantly distinguishes it from cinema and literature. This allows the game to reveal the philosophy of the world and show it from different angles, defining a number of key tasks for the developers, one of which will be the creation of an immersive space in which the players can fully feel responsible for their choices and meaningfully approach to acceptance.

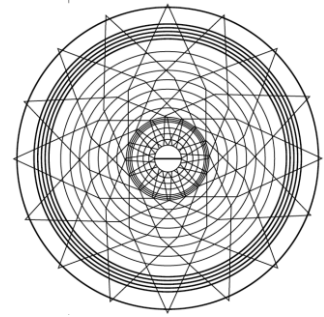
Another important characteristic of the narrative is the class stratification of society. Stratification can occur both according to "the leader and the follower" model, and through a more complex distribution into fractions. Factionalism embodies social segregation and lays the foundation for class opposition. In the works of the cyberpunk genre, the root of the plot is always the conflict between the rich and the poor. But the rich are not just the aristocracy of the future, they are corporations, conglomerates and monopolists. They either run society or have access to technologies and connections that are inaccessible to much of humanity. The more the hero is immersed in the story, the more often he will notice that the corporate dictatorship acts as a poison and poisons all segments of society. In this regard, the main conflict of cyberpunk is not just a struggle, but an attempt at self-determination and finding your place in life.

An important role in this is played by the technologization of society. In the Deus Ex series, wealthy people can afford access to high-tech prostheses, while ordinary citizens

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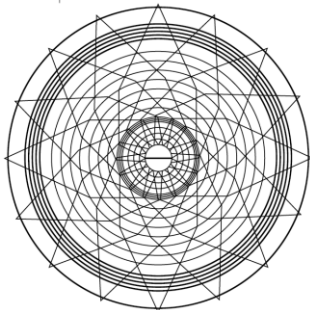


cannot. Prostheses give the owner a strong advantage, in connection with which social stratification increases every year: as a result, people without expensive modifications cease to be taken even to the position of a security guard. Society in such worlds is moving to a new stage, where people themselves are inherently approaching replaceable parts. An important position is occupied by hacker activity. Data leaks, information trading, and technology hacking raise pressing issues in the real world and the future of humanity. In this regard, the dominance of visualized information in the environment becomes indisputable. Screen culture and screen as the main means of communication become a determining factor in social interaction between spheres of human life.

Anthropology of philosophy and class representation

Despite the fact that in modern fiction the search for pure utopias and dystopias is difficult, most works of the genre contain their characteristic elements (Grinenko, 2018). Visually, the narrative of power is manifested through many elements of the narrative. In the game BioShock Infinite (2013), the action takes place in an alternate reality, where the city of Columbia was built specifically for the World's Fair of 1893. According to the game's lore, over time, as a result of the conflict and separation from the United States, the flying police city-state turned into a pseudo-Christian dystopia. The virtual embodiment of the criticism of American exceptionalism is revealed to the player through the opposition of the ideal "upper" world of a colorful fair and a poor "lower" one – a space of discord and poverty. Such a hierarchy reflects an important code of dystopian aesthetics – the vertical. Vertical lines, vertical hierarchy, top-bottom opposition, appropriate segregation of the population – all these become defining features that are dictated by the model of a world where power is out of reach and comes from somewhere above. Vertical line helps to create visual codes, reproducing philosophical concepts in the form of an understandable opposition. Hierarchy becomes the main engine of the narrative, revealing history not only through images and references, but also through the inner meaning of its elements. Stefan Schubert notes the important role played by light and color in the design of the upper urban level. Emphasizing the positivity and optimism that the space of the city is supposed to emphasize, these accents create the illusion of happiness and luxury (Schubert, 2018).

The architectural appearance of Columbia absorbed the main features of the colonial style, the American Renaissance and the Bozar, as well as the concept of City Beautiful, an example of the ideal embodiment of which in the real world was the "White City", created for the same World Exhibition of 1893. The "White City" as an example of the American urban ideal was based on the idea of the unity of the modern transport system



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and a strict architectural canon, in which symmetry, a large order and majestic pomp played a key role. The emphasis on noble and utilitarian structures of public importance ideologically opposed the mass construction of tenements, which was caused by the economic, sanitary and migration crises in America as a result of urban growth. The spread of slums and poor areas in the late nineteenth century did not benefit the appearance of cities, so an important difference of the "White City" was a city as a space in which poverty would not be visible. This extremely dystopian project, due to which the illusion of the ideal is maintained and real problems are hushed up, is directly reflected in the in-game Columbia.

Withal, ideal streets along which the richly dressed guests of the fair walk peacefully, serve as a facade of internal content. In the nooks and crannies players can meet smoking children who hide from the main crowd. Unfriendly police and an abundance of barriers create a sense of artificiality. The atmosphere of a museum exposition where you can look only at those objects that are on public display reigns around. As the game progresses, this feeling is confirmed: locations outside the main idyll consist of experimental laboratories, protected buildings and littered warehouses with dirty walls, propaganda posters and a quantity of enemies.

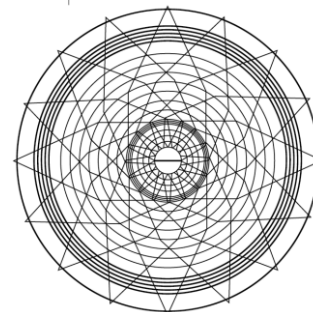
Such a stylistic choice corresponds not only to the real architectural, but also to the ideological trends of America of that time, elevating them to the level of the grotesque. Ultranationalism, which flourishes at all levels, and the assertion of the superiority of the white wealthy person finds support from the state. Virtual graphics of the game space, represented mainly by advertising and propaganda posters, universally promote the Puritan vision of the family and public morality, as well as work for the benefit of the nation. People of a different skin color on them are found only in a derogatory connotation. This corresponds to the urban reality, where they work in low-paid hard work and belong to a number of disadvantaged groups.

In contrast to the ideal utopia of the upper world are not only its "backyards", but also the lower city – Factory Worker Housing. Also known as the Shantytown, it represents the opposite of the idea of the "White City". The garbage-filled area, in which waste from sewage pipes pours directly into the street, serves as a place of survival for beggars. The poor beg for alms against the background of walls painted in graffiti with threats to the authorities and requests for help. All this ironically echoes the logos of the main local employer, Fink Industries, which are found here everywhere. The visual presence of the company in such conditions emphasizes the indifference of the authorities, and the policy of hired slavery allows us to consider the area as a territory of alienation. For example, factory workers receive salaries in currency, which can only be spent on factory's

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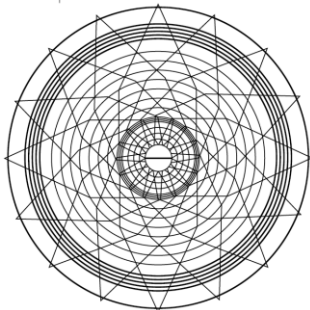


products, which actually allows the company not to lose any capital and subordinate employees to its will.

The architecture of the lower town is represented by tall apartment buildings, most of which are in a deplorable state. Instead of cleaned glass, balloons and developing flags of upper Columbia, we see boarded-up windows, holes in the roofs and torn pieces of fabric hanging along the facades. In contrast to the light-filled expanse of the fair, the slums are filled with smog and dust. Between the windows of the houses hang linen ropes, the motif of which is often found as a symbol of poverty. It is in this forgotten area, according to the plot of the game, the headquarters of the "Voice of the People" is located, which makes an additional contribution to the understanding of the dystopian narrative as an inverted allusion to Heaven and Hell. According to the game legend, the leader of Columbia, being the Savior, plunges the treacherous opposition into Hell, which allows him to build his own Paradise. Thus, the leader of the opposition is equated with the main antagonist, who pursues selfish goals and interferes with the ideal future. All his companions become enemies of the new society, which means that access to Paradise is closed to them.

So, the pseudo-Christian dystopia, where religion becomes a weapon of propaganda, promotes the same vertical – upper-lower, heaven-hell, good-bad, where one is always unconditionally above the other by virtue of its truth. Without announcing this idea directly, the state reproduces it in advertising, slogans, laws and art in order to indirectly maintain the illusion of elitism of its own ideology. Such codes are regularly encountered by the player as they get acquainted with the world. They act as a powerful narrative force that is able to immerse themselves in the appropriate atmosphere and allows the player to read information outside the main story.

No less important is the fact that the plot location is a closed system: a city, a country, a district or even a building. The game world is a hermetically sealed system in which restrictions on personal and social freedoms become inevitable (Korolyova, 2011). Rapture city from the game BioShock 2 (2010) through external content reproduces the inner meaning, telling the player its own story. The industrial aesthetics of steel, glass and strict geometry correspond to the idealism of the creator, who dreamed of building an ideal city away from the post-war target. According to the lore of the game, the capitalist utopia faced social realities and the failed policies of its leader. Over time, it reproduced everything from which it fled: corruption, labor exploitation and poverty, now confined under the water column. Similarly, the virtual text in a negative form reflects the concept of reification, which can be considered on the example of the formation of a real technocratic civilization, where sensualism, rationalism and materialism together materialize the political, social, interpersonal and legal spheres of human life



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(Ovchinnikov & Kazachanskaya, 2021). The virtual text in a negative form reflects the concept of reification, which can be considered on the example of the formation of a real technocratic civilization, where sensualism, rationalism and materialism together materialize the political, social, interpersonal and legal spheres of human life (Ovchinnikov & Kazachanskaya, 2021). In the plot of BioShock 2, this mechanistic project fails and marginalizes society, transforming a potential digital utopia into a closed dystopia with social stratification. Such a collapse appears as the result of an initial error of perception, in which idealistic aspirations, when faced with the real world, do not turn out to be capable of confrontation. Prostitution is also a significant theme in the underwater city narrative. For example, on the street of a pseudo-utopian city, player can meet a pimp who claims that sexual intimacy is no different than any other commodity. One of the city alleys also contains a brothel The Pink Pearl. And where there is prostitution, there is a place for social stratification. This example is another one in the treasury of the special role of intimacy in dystopian worlds.

At the same time, it does not matter whether class stratification appears as a result of a decision of the government or a planned project, since dystopian management itself is always interested in preserving social differences (Sadikhova, 2011). Class struggle corresponds to the concept of verticality and emphasizes the inequality that permeates through the "ideal" society, where the equal opportunities promised by the social hierarchy are only an illusion, hiding differences.

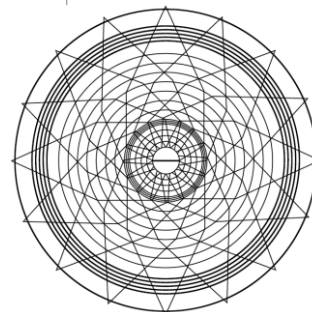
Dialogue of differences and preventive nature of social fears

In the cyberpunk setting opposition of classes has an ideological content that comes from the original literary genre and its further transformation in cinema. Initially, the problems of the genre proceeded from intellectual criteria and only over time acquired an aesthetic orientation in the fan environment (Moyzhes, 2015). For the authentic expressiveness of both sides, the motif of the city acquires special importance. Being a closed system, it assumes the function of a mirror and completely reflects the state of the society of the future. People actually give up nature, but still find themselves encased in an analogue of a wild forest – a reinforced concrete jungle in which criminals become predators, and a sense of alienation borders on the desire to survive. The same laws of control and hierarchy apply, which take a slightly different form of corporate dictatorship and the primacy of technology. A key factor in social stratification is the question of access to the products of scientific and technological progress, around which all spheres of activity are tied. The fact of replaceability and the analogy of a person with a detail generates corresponding fears: no matter how high the position is, the violation of a strict system of rules can lead to falling from heaven to earth.

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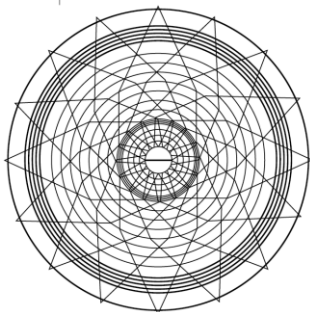
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Continuing the semantics of the narrative of a negative utopia, cyberpunk modifies the concept of alienation and connects it with a critique of transhumanism. Man, as an imperfect being requiring technical modification, is alienated from his own body (Kutyrev, 2018). Initially, the positive orientation of bionic prosthetics comes into conflict with capitalist reality: the "ordinary" human body becomes imperfect in the face of the state, society and its own. The conflict of the individual and the mass, the transformation of the own self, the destruction of interpersonal ties is laid at the heart of a dystopian narrative. Fear becomes the inner atmosphere (Chernyak, 2006). Corporations often act as representatives of the supreme power of the future and resort to new methods of control. The main way of dialogue between them and people is advertising. This dialogue is mostly one-sided, and advertising haunts citizens everywhere: from smartphones to visually overloaded skyscrapers. A characteristic feature here is the emphasized virtualization of the environment through the Internet, the computer and projecting technologies. Advertising itself is also virtual – most often they are either projections or screens. They are the basis of the visual culture of cyberpunk and the main means of communication. At the same time, the propaganda of ideology characteristic of dystopia does not go anywhere: its place is taken by the cult of consumption and the abundance of simulacra.

A popular image of the perfect ending in dystopias is the motif of the hero's return to pristine nature and freedom, which is not limited by conventions (Cherepanova, 1999). In contrast to the traditional dystopia, in the cyberpunk genre, the hero most often has more freedom. He is less eager to get away from the urban environment, but despite this he still feels its pressure. As an alternative to the "beautiful nature of the past", a number of plots feature virtual space – a place with an almost limitless set of possibilities, offering a temporary escape from reality. In this regard, questions of addiction and escapism arise, which, in the context of technopessimism and futurophobia, receive a new round of development with the advent of the XXI century (Didkovskaya & Bertova, 2020).

In *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020), one form of such care is braindancing: a technology that allows to broadcast recording of another person's sensations and emotions using a brain implant. The braindance industry raises many ethical and psychological issues. For example, recordings can carry positive emotions, and can demonstrate scenes of violence and cruelty. The issue of addiction to such content is directly related to drug addiction, since braindancing signals enter the nervous system through the brain and are interpreted as real. The class division finds itself here: prostitution, slavery, underground trade in records – all this divides society into dependents and those who earn money from them.



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Night City, the main game location is a large urban agglomeration with adjacent areas. The population, according to the setting, is divided into poor, rich and nomads: most of them are opposed not only ideologically, but also stylistically. According to the lore of the game, the city has one of the most corrupt governance systems in the world. It was established after the seizure of power by criminal groups that destroyed the original utopian project with cybernetic terrorism and lack of control over illegal activities. The local analogue of paradise are two adjacent districts: Westbrook and the central corporate sector. Westbrook is an elite neighborhood for those who work in the offices of mega-corporations, which, in turn, are located in a well-protected city center. Its semantic dominant is skyscrapers – a symbol of profit maximization and recurring vertical line motif. The interconnection of the two districts gives rise to a single cycle of "home-work-entertainment": the ideal life and the daily circulation of the concept of elitism. By intuitively correlating the objects of the virtual world with real analogues (Podwalny, 2020), players feel a given tone of elitism and the ideology of success. The architectural appearance and atmosphere of the districts is inspired by the prototype in reality – the central district of Hong Kong Central.

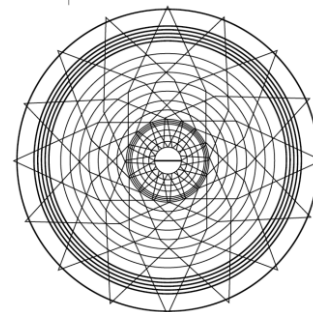
In the design of game levels, the ability of architecture to tell unique stories is given special attention. Through the external computer graphics reveal an embedded inner meaning that the player can pass through and past. The tasks of the architect and the level designer here get as close as possible: both pursue the goal to create a space that would not only perform its function, but also make a proper impression. The video game language, focused primarily on interactivity and gameplay, is able to reproduce the necessary visual codes. The corresponding aesthetics are formed through the game syntax and the creation of meanings that are somehow perceived by most players on a global level.

The narrative of the Cyberpunk 2077 focuses on believability. The story is more about the characters than the popular trail of dangerous threat. This allows players to reveal the problems of cyberpunk more personally and through the social struggles. Accordingly, the plausible world seeks to get closer to the actual reality. It is moderately futuristic and duly contains a reference to the tangible reality that surrounds the player: the infancy world of neo-feudalism, where transnational corporations are gradually acquiring power equivalent to those of states (Shearing, 2001). Neo-feudalism is also manifested in the collection of "tribute" from disadvantaged segments of the population, where criminal groups and their leaders act as new feudal lords, who gradually subordinate society to their interests from within (Danilevsky, 2013). In accordance with the laws of the dystopian world, power becomes either virtually invisible or as far as possible removed from the ordinary person.

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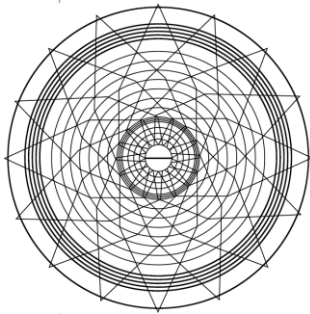
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In cyberpunk, the state in the traditional sense has no place, since everything is controlled by profit. The aesthetics of *Cyberpunk 2077* convincingly visualize these problems. Advertising as the main means of communication is introduced into the players field of view from everywhere. The leading role is given to the product, or a fictional image. Both works around basic needs and alienate the consumer from themselves. On explicit digital banners, all sorts of goods are advertised: from food to weapons. Themes of violence and pathos, combined with contrasting posters and street graffiti, form a unique entourage of the game world in combination with the architecture of the future (Shibaev, 2021).

The game showcases a futuristic vision of what a corporate-run city would look like. One of the developer goals was to create a characteristic visual language between districts and social strata (Tommasino, 2020). While the central part consists of elite skyscrapers made of steel, reinforced concrete and glass, most of Night City is a direct analogue of the corporate idyll. Multi-storey, overlapping and intersecting buildings, in which companies and the mafia fight for a profitable site, create the feeling of an unorganized anthill. It is difficult for ordinary people here to find a place to stay – everything is occupied by trading platforms. The building is built on a building, and high-rise buildings are often erected without taking into account urban logistics, which gives rise to slums. This is reminiscent of the active stage of development of the city of Osaka (Morphologis, 2021) of the times of the Japanese economic miracle, when the colossal pace of development lowered many things into the background: for example, the creation of a master plan of the territory and the change of the street map. In cyberpunk, the building itself and what is inside it is much more significant. After all, you can get somewhere not only by road, but also by a flying car.

The broad influence of Asian architectural thought in cyberpunk is undeniable. Examples of inspiration include the fight against slum cities in Hong Kong and the public housing program – large-scale projects to counter false urbanization and build affordable homes for the poor. Combining traditional urbanism, *tong lau*¹ and small private houses with new multi-storey architecture, the government sought to improve living conditions. In parallel with this, in Japan, an important place in the design of residential buildings in the middle of the XX century is occupied by metabolism. The cluster principle of development, which was the basis of the course, correlated with the vision of the city as a living organism, which, as a result of technological development, is regularly transformed. Hong Kong's social architecture and Japanese metabolism are among the many prototypes. When studying the world, one discovers an abundant borrowing of stylistic techniques of different periods by architects such as Kisho Kurokawa, Kenzō Tange, Tadao Ando, Kiyonori Kikutake, Fumihiko Maki, combining them with the ideas



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and aesthetics of brutalism, industrial neo-futurism, interiors and exteriors of Asian Art Deco. Art Director of Environment Lucjan Wiecek stated that when creating the four main styles of the city, the team also drew inspiration from the work of Dieter Rams and Syd Mead (Rivera, 2020). Night City itself, combining the appearance of such megacities as Los Angeles, New York, Detroit, Osaka, Hong Kong and others, draws a visible line between poverty and wealth, order and chaos.

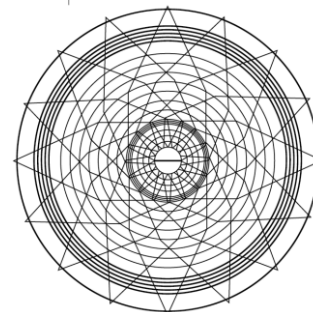
In Cyberpunk 2077, one of the typical types of buildings are megablocks – monolithic cubist structures that incorporate the features of the Nakagin Capsule Tower by Kisho Kurokawa, one of the ideologists of metabolism, and the concept of arcology, visualized in the dystopian universe of the film *Dredd* (2012). The player encounters this aesthetic in the multi-storey building Megabuilding H10, where the character's apartment is located. The oppressive feeling of poverty is expressed in a number of factors. The small amount of light caused by the dense perimeter plan of the apartments is contrasted with the eternally bright city, in which the sun shines during the day, and screens and neon signs at night. The inner darkness of Megabuilding H10 is projected in the atmosphere among the residents. Depression, a low level of security is felt not only externally, but also reflected in local quests. Piles of garbage are laid out in the dark corners, open utilities and sparkling wines are visible everywhere. Air conditioners go straight into the corridors and create a feeling of sticky heat in the steam-shrouded passages. From an unusual side, the concept of "metamorphosis" from the works of Kisho Kurokawa realizes itself here, through which the pupal stage, the intermediate stage of life, is personified with the person's perception of the space of the passage zones of the building: corridors, foyers (Khasieva, 2018).

While for most residents the doll stage ends with cheap housing, the player is waiting for an unexpected contrast in the form of an unusually spacious, bright and well-furnished room of the protagonist. It also contains features of capsule architecture: in the likeness of the Japanese "capsule" there is a bed. The contrast between personal and typical rooms is necessary to show that even in this kind of building there are luxury apartments for those who do not want to live in plain sight. According to a similar scenario, the criminal business works: elite and closed clubs, the owners of which are the local mafia, outside do not get out of the general array of slums, and inside are equipped with expensive and high-tech. The leaders of the underworld work in the shadows and do not put money on display, preferring investment and privacy. In the project of the apartment of the protagonist, two unusual elements are installed: an armory room and a vending machine. An unexpected choice serves to communicate two simple thoughts. First, the cult of consumption will overtake everywhere: there is no kitchen in the room, which means that food can either be ordered or bought at the machine. Secondly, the weapons

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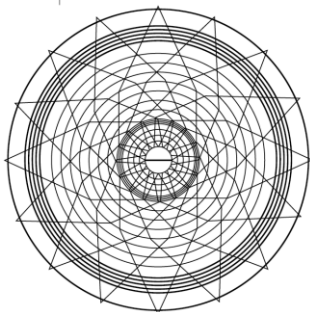
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storage room laid down in the plan confirms the danger and cruelty of the world beyond the threshold. This is not so much a gameplay solution as a statement of fact: the city is so dangerous that the need for such rooms is regulated by law.

The open world of the game has a multifaceted reflection of the visual code of the slums. One of the sources of inspiration are stone anthills: large-scale complexes of multi-storey block houses as a symbol of depression and poverty, which is clearly seen in the series "Architecture of Density" by Michael Wolf (Macdonald, 2014). The abandoned and untidy appearance of public catering establishments in the style of Googie, focused in reality on a utopian idea, the chaotic confusion of houses built on top of each other, street garbage dumps – these codes reproduce the necessary meanings and enter into a narrative dialogue with players, allowing them to focus more on visual text than on written one.

Similarly, *Disco Elysium* (2019) takes place in Martinaire, a district of the city of Revachol, which at the time of the story becomes a bulwark of a trade union strike against the policies of The Wild Pines Group. The in-game world illustrates parts of the story without words: dilapidated streets and neglected houses indirectly tell the player about poverty and devastation. In the recent past, the city was badly damaged by the intervention by the Coalition of Nations, implemented with the aim of establishing a more "perfect" capitalist system to replace the "undesirable" communist regime. Traces of shelling, boarded-up windows and closed enterprises look especially eloquent against the background of general desolation and tangible poverty, acting as a passive narrator. The main means of communication with the world is a dialogue with the characters, the thoughts of the hero and the city itself. Dialogicity allows the space to open up from different sides. According to the plot, the player will inevitably encounter a racial issue, supporters of eugenics and nationalism. The obviousness of the reference to fascist ideology is ironically presented through the refusal of characters with similar views to consider themselves as such. So, the game raises the complex issue of negative legacy, on the one hand, condemning the ideology and mocking it, and on the other, approaching it with apprehension – the fascists in the game are felt as a potential threat. In the context of the acute politicization of the game environment and the general devastation, one of the antagonists is the capitalist system itself, the opposition to which in such conditions raises the themes of the burden of war, the danger of alternatives and class division. Even in the dilapidated Martinaire, part of the district is reserved for an even poorer fishing village, which the head of the local trade union allegedly dreams of turning into a youth center. The inhabitants of the city suffer not only from poverty and the need to survive. The game raises such problems as alcoholism, drug use, depression



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and suicidal thoughts, including the example of the ambiguous personality of the protagonist.

Conclusion

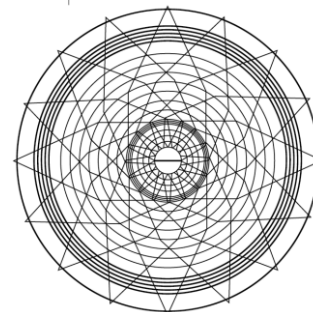
One of the questions raised at the very beginning was how visual elements are used in the story. As a result, it turned out that the elements of game locations can function and be perceived by the player regardless of the main storyline. Architecture can have a unique language that is inspired by the real projects and visual studies of architects and urbanists. It also turned out that open world game spaces tend to have an abundance of meanings that are unlikely to be fully revealed even to an attentive player. This raises the question of the possibility and necessity of their study, and hence the potential for an entire discipline capable of studying video game narratives and aesthetics. An additional result was the answer to the question about the relationship between the visual aesthetics of the first and second wave dystopias. It turned out that the cyberpunk genre, despite the changes, largely continues the classic dystopian literary narratives. Originally a literary genre, the cyberpunk genre is being developed in cinema. In the future, game design borrows many of the developments of directors, including the design of virtual cities. Despite this, common visual codes can be traced in games of different genres and designs of virtual worlds.

Competent representation of the inner content of the selected setting had been analyzed in this work also. Responsible performance of this task is supervised by a game designer with a help of visual codes, the basis for which is laid not only in literature and cinema, but also in philosophy of virtual world and even reality itself. Through the connection of space and its philosophy, a set of key problems relevant to the chosen world is determined. For example, the embodiment of illusory and mythical power in all spheres of human life or poverty as the collapse of a utopian idea. The narrative of power as the dominant force helps characters to realize themselves and lays the psychologism of situations. In turn, the use of architectural solutions and virtual graphics helps to reflect the internal ideology of the world through the external appearance. Game images are overflowing with propaganda of ideology, and the closed nature of the system, from which people cannot or do not want to escape, contributes to the best atmosphere for maintaining inequality: locked in such a state cause sympathy, futuristic fears and provoke conflict between the text and the reader. Drawing inspiration from the world around them, the authors of virtual spaces visualize themes of discrimination and class struggle using a series of visual patterns. Each of them is a semantic code that is able to pass from story to story. Artistic reminiscences and the search for prototypes play an important role in this, because any art is just a reproduction of already existing images.

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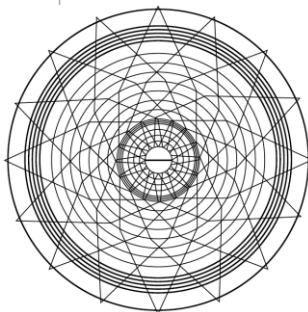
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So, the power of video games as an art satisfies the human need for meanings, helping to create emotions, significance and, as a result, involvement in the narrative.

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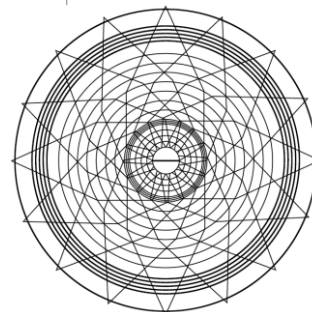
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ВИЗУАЛЬНЫЕ КОДЫ АНТИУТОПИИ В ВИДЕОИГРАХ: РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ КЛАССОВЫХ РАЗЛИЧИЙ

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Аннотация:

На сегодняшний день видеоигры в том или ином виде присутствуют в жизни каждого человека. Междисциплинарный характер научных дисциплин позволяет рассматривать их с точки зрения как технических, так и гуманитарных наук. При этом характер исследования будет зависеть от многих факторов: сеттинга, жанра, стиля, истории игрового мира или особенностей геймплея. Даже сам подход к изучению видеоигр может отличаться в зависимости от того, на чём конкретный исследователь решит сосредоточить своё внимание. Основная задача данной работы — анализ визуальных кодов репрезентации социальных классов, которые используют художники и гейм-дизайнеры при создании антиутопических пространств. Цель исследования — попытаться ответить на следующие вопросы: что визуализация классовых различий даёт видеоиграм? Какова природа этих репрезентаций? Как сеттинг антиутопии влияет на графические элементы повествования? Как философия антиутопического мира вступает в диалог с игровым пространством?

Социально-классовое расслоение выступает в качестве неотъемлемого элемента повествования в антиутопических сюжетах. И если в литературе визуальность существует только в описательной форме, при поддержке воображения читателя, то в видеоиграх и кино необходимость кодирования пространства с помощью визуального языка выходит на первый план при проектировании виртуального мира. Сформированная в XX веке литературная база служит для разработчиков игровых сред источником идей для демонстрации не только трудностей жизни под тотальным контролем. Важным становится визуализация тех смысловых элементов, которые лежат в основе антиутопического общества, различий между жизнью привилегированного класса и отчужденной личностью, ограниченной обществом, политикой и правилами.

Ключевые слова: гейм стадис, эстетика видеоигр, визуальный код, реминисценция, антиутопия, сеттинг